

# THE GRAMOPHONE

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## EDITORIAL

OUR review grows and flourishes apace, and the steady and intelligent support that I am receiving from all over the country, not to mention the dominions and the colonies, is of the happiest possible augury for the future of music. I take this opportunity of congratulating the Vocalion Company on the greatly improved surface of their records beginning with the October issue. Moreover, this has not been achieved at the expense of any tone, but if anything with an improved tone. The publication by His Master's Voice of Beethoven's great violin concerto is a most gratifying response to the article in our June number, "Fiddlers and Violinists," and I hope that all our readers will show their appreciation of such music in the only practical way. I wish that the recording companies could be persuaded to see themselves as publishers, which is what they really are, and take the public into their confidence by announcing beforehand the principal works they intend to give us during the spring and autumn seasons. The policy of bringing out great works of music on the Jack-in-the-box principle savours too much of commercial sharpness. Incidentally it leads to the unnecessary duplication of great works, and it is destructive of the dignity which I should like to see the companies assume. It is always difficult to lecture a great commercial concern, because of its exceptional sensitiveness compared with the sensitiveness of the individual artist who is accustomed to receive criticism. If I were to print a small percentage of my correspondent's criticisms, I am afraid that the swinging glass-doors of several large concerns would crack with mortification. One of the troubles of the recording companies is their inclination to suppose that a record is good in proportion to the amount spent on producing it. Whereas, of course, the only standard is the success or failure of the finished product, irrespective of the hundreds or thousands of pounds spent upon it. Gradually we shall see a growth of a dignified spirit to match the dignified work that is being produced. So long as the great recording companies existed on songs about sunbonnets, it was impossible for them to have any dignity; but now things are changed, and I most earnestly hope to recognise in their attitude to their wares the attitude of mind which we have learnt to associate with the majesty of British publishing.

Postcards from readers willing to be members of my proposed society keep coming in, but so far nobody has proposed the right name for it. For the benefit of new readers who may not have seen the original scheme, I may repeat that the object of this society is to produce a certain number of people willing to guarantee the necessary minimum of sale that would make it worth while for the recording companies to produce compositions nominated by the votes of the members. We should aim roughly at one symphony, one concerto, and three complete pieces of chamber music annually. The list of members grows daily, but we want more.

*Compton Mackenzie*

## REVIEW OF THE THIRD QUARTER OF 1923

THE third quarter of this year was notable for two outstanding publications—Beethoven's Seventh Symphony by the Columbia, and Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony by His Master's Voice. Both works are complete with the exception of one repeat in the second movement of the *Pathetic*, and of both I think that it is strictly true to say that in their different ways they are triumphs of recording. The Columbia people make a welcome innovation in publishing their five double-sided records in a neat album. It is perhaps too much to hope that complete symphonies issued in albums will be a regular (dare I hint quarterly?) feature of the recording companies' lists; but I would make so bold as to invite the Columbia people to stamp the name of the work on the back of the cover to prepare for the great day when our shelves will have so many of these albums that we shall require the name on the back as well as on the sides. The tenth side of the contents is occupied by a pleasant little dance from *The Tempest*. If I say that I prefer the work of Weingartner as a conductor to his work as a composer, I do not fancy that I am saying anything uncomplimentary, for his conducting of the Seventh is beautifully austere, and a work which is really one long exquisite dance demands austerity. The second movement is the most popular, but my own favourite is the introduction elaborated almost into a fifth movement. It reminds me of a gavotte of Mozart's that I once heard and have never been able to trace. If any reader is reminded of the same gavotte and will let me know where it occurs I shall be grateful. If there is any weakness in the recording it lies in the strings, which are always apt to turn into wood-wind on the gramophone, but perhaps more so in Columbia records than in others. I notice this particularly about the 'cellos, and yet their recording of the instrument solo is unusually good. I may mention here that I found the reproduction more satisfactory on an H.M.V. machine with a Tremusa sound-box and a Columbia De Luxe needle, than on the Orchestraphone with an Astra sound-box. On the other hand, the *Pathetic* was incomparably better on the Orchestraphone with the Astra sound-box and Cleopatra needle than with its own machine, sound-box and needle. By the way, in view of one or two disconcerting little rattles, I shall be glad to hear the opinions of our readers upon the wearing qualities of the new Columbia records. My Léner Quartet performances of the Schubert *Andante* and the Mozart *Allegro* have both gone at two points in the 'cello part, and I want to know if this is due to

my having used (pretty often) an extra-loud Tung-style needle on them, or whether there was always a flaw in the record which has been increased by hard playing. None of the other records with this wax has been played often enough by me to test its wearing qualities, and I am most anxious not to blame the wax if the needle be at fault. Although I think that nothing beats a Tungstyle for strings, I am afraid of its effect. Here, again, I invoke the aid of our readers to clear up the uncertainty in my own mind. I have been told that it is quite safe so long as you don't move the needle until you move it for good. To return to the Seventh Symphony, I cannot resist making a silly joke and saying, "If you know a better whole, find it."

Since I wrote the above I have had the opportunity of hearing this very symphony at one of the Promenade Concerts. I am bound to say that the complete failure of the recorders to reproduce the timpani does damage the gramophone version. I urge recorders to give as much of their attention to the percussion as lately they have been giving to the pianoforte, in the recording of which such strides have been made merely in the last few months. One or two of our correspondents have criticised fiercely the Columbia records of the Seventh Symphony, and I am wondering if they are missing the right balance between strings and wood-wind, or whether the absence of percussion has emasculated the whole performance, or whether in eliminating the scratch from the record the Columbia Company has eliminated too much of the tone at the same time. I think the possibility of the last hypothesis is strengthened by the indubitable fact that the records will not stand up to an instrument like the Orchestraphone and a loud-tone needle like the Cleopatra. The reproduction of the *Pathetic* offers, in a way, a better opportunity to the recorder owing to the richness of the orchestration, and I can assure you that with a good sound-box for the bass, like the Astra or the Sonat, and an instrument with a big amplifier like the Orchestraphone, you will be astonished at the result. I do not think that I have ever heard the orchestra more safely imprisoned in the gramophone before. I enjoyed, too, Sir Landon Ronald's conducting of it, although he is far from being my favourite romantic conductor, being too often prone to conduct an orchestra as if it was a bus. Even here he seems afraid of the third movement.

From the Vocalion Company this quarter comes the completion of McEwen's *Solway Symphony*,

played by the Aeolian Orchestra and conducted by Mr. Cuthbert Whitemore (Voc. J.04941-42-43). I hope our readers who can afford the necessary guinea will make a point of securing these three records so that the enterprise of the company in producing a big work of contemporary music may not be discouraged. My readers know that I am perhaps unduly prejudiced against the modern school, but I did perceive in this symphony a feeling for construction and actually here and there a trace of melodic invention, both welcome enough in modern music. I heard for the first time while I was in London Arnold Bax's *Tintagel*, which struck me as being like an enthusiastic but badly written letter by somebody who had just arrived at the seaside for his summer holidays. At any rate, the *Solway Symphony* is something better than this. Mere orchestration, however ingenious and however novel, is not going to produce a great musical composition, any more than a rich vocabulary without anything else is going to produce a great novel. Except that the Beauty and the Beast movement of Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* is included, I do not care for the H.M.V. version (D.708-D.709) as much as the Vocalion version. It is true that Mr. Cuthbert Whitemore and the Aeolian Orchestra have been severely handicapped by a scratch that is almost a movement in itself and might be called *The White Cat*; but the music will stand a fibre needle, or better still a sympathetic chromic needle at its greatest length, and played thus I enjoyed it quite considerably more than the interpretation given by Mr. Albert Coates and the Symphony Orchestra, which has a kind of "cockiness" about it. There are two exceptionally good light orchestral records from the Columbia Company this quarter, selections from Charpentier's *Louise* (L.1479) and *Carmen* (L.1485) by the new Queen's Hall Light Orchestra, with Alick McLean conducting. The castanets in the latter have set up a new "record" in records, but I should certainly call this the best selection obtainable of *Carmen*. It is strange that the selection from *Louise* should apparently be the first ever done from that opera for the gramophone. Anyway, it is unlikely to be done better for a long time. On the other hand, *Fingal's Cave* has been done very often, but never so well in my experience as on this new record by Sir Henry Wood and the Queen's Hall Orchestra (L.1478). Finally, of Columbia orchestral records I want to draw our readers' very particular attention to a couple of most attractive excerpts from *The Immortal Hour* played by the London Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Mr. Rutland Boughton himself (935). I recommend this record over any of their 7/6 records mentioned just before it. They are two really delicious melodies and both are deliciously played and recorded.

To leave orchestral music for a moment and look at some of the songs. Fernand Ansseau has given

us a dull song from that dreary opera *Samson et Delilah*, which, however, is a very fine record *qua* record (H.M.V. 2-032073). Fleta has given us a splendid rendering of a melodious love song from *I Puritani* (H.M.V. 7-52236) which makes me long for a really good performance of a Bellini opera next year. It is such a relief to listen to some music that was written for the voice, instead of music that was written against it. We also had the last scene from Verdi's *Aida*, sung by Fleta, Austral, and Edna Thornton (H.M.V. 2-054131-32) which, though a fine piece of recording, struck me as a failure. Madame Austral has been singing too much Wagner and must learn not to scream in order to express emotion. Some of her high notes in this record are more like fire alarms than anything else, and I cannot say I was as much impressed as I expected to be by Fleta's singing. We do not want competitive duets, and operatic singers must remember that besides being singers they ought to be actors. The trouble is that when they reach any kind of position no producer can keep them in order. Everybody knows that Madame Austral has a superb voice, and if she will only learn to act, or in other words not to sing every one of her songs without any attempt to express the sense of what she is trying to sing as well as the sound, she will be something more than a singer—she will be an artist, which she is far from being at present. Gigli gave us an excellent rendering of one of the songs from *Andrea Chénier* (H.M.V. 2-0522-33), and Ruffo an admirable performance of *Quand 'ero paggio* from *Falstaff* (7-52224); but with regard to this record it is not fair to charge the public 5/6 for exactly 60 seconds singing and 20 seconds accompaniment. It is all very well to make contracts with celebrities and maintain their reputations by presenting them only on single-sided discs, but we want that side filled, and it would have been perfectly easy to include another song and issued the pair on a 12in. disc. Galli-Curci's singing of the hackneyed *Chanson Hindoue* from *Sadko* (7-33059) is, for her, a failure. Alma Gluck has done it much better, although she was not given the exceptionally charming accompaniment that Galli-Curci gets in this record. In any case, the song is a tenor song, and much more beautiful when sung by a tenor. I do wish that singers would not be so vain, and I do wish that they would not feel it necessary to imitate their rivals' choice of songs. I suppose, in view of our descent, it is too much to expect artists to keep clear of the monkey-house, but at least they might not give such prominence to the human pedigree. Of the other songs I would draw special attention to Madame Gerhardt's rendering of *Der Erlkönig* (Voc. C.01095), which though not so successful, I fancy, as her previous songs, is indispensable to any collection. Generally speaking, the singing this quarter has been dull. I should like to hear the new Columbia tenor, Ulysses Lappas, in something less

dramatic than *Pagliacci*, which is all he has given us so far. Talking of *Pagliacci* I have seldom heard *On with the Motley* sung better than by Mr. Browning Mummery on Zonophone A.274. On the reverse of this is *Che gelida manina* from *Bohème*, which it is interesting to compare with Hislop's version (H.M.V. 2-052232). In many ways Hislop is my favourite tenor, and if Browning Mummery, handicapped as he is by the words being in English, compared very favourably with him, it means that he stands out in my mind as a really first-class tenor. He sang for the British National Opera Company last season and I hope will do so again next season, for here is a man who can act as well as sing, and that is a very difficult combination to find among English-speaking people. It is a pity that he has given us two such hackneyed songs for his first records, because one feels a certain diffidence in advising one's readers to spend any more money on *Pagliacci* and *Bohème*. But I really was very much impressed by Mr. Browning Mummery and look forward to hearing other records of him. I was a little disappointed in Chaliapin's singing of *The Midnight Review*, and those that already have Norman Allin's version of this song need not kick themselves for not waiting for Chaliapin.

The *Coq d'Or* suite (H.M.V. D.733, 734) is a very fine piece of orchestral recording. There is no doubt that His Master's Voice has brought orchestral recording to a much higher degree of perfection than it has ever reached yet in the history of the gramophone. They get a real quality of tone into their massed strings better than any of their rivals, and all through their definition is superior.

Of chamber music during the quarter the Vocalion Company brought out the completion of the Smetana Quartet, which, whether the mistake lay in the recording or in the interpretation, does not seem quite to come off. The same company has issued the first part of Mr. Lionel Tertis' arrangement of the Grieg Sonata in C minor for the viola. I am bound to say that I think the change of instruments makes the whole composition too fruity; I felt all the time I was listening to it as if I was drinking a particularly heavy port. I sympathise with Mr. Tertis' search for music for the viola, but personally I should be inclined to steal from the violoncello rather than the violin. The most delightful piece of chamber music this month is the English String Quartet's performance of the Haydn Quartet in E flat; No. 6, Op. 64, wrongly printed as No. 3 in the catalogue (Col. 937, 938). These two records, issued at a popular price, I recommend to anybody who wishes to make a beginning with chamber music. The music is as sweet and simple as bird's song; the recording is perfect; and the leadership of the first violin is exactly what leadership should be. The two records cost 9/- at the revised prices and they simply must not be missed. The

Columbia Company issued another very beautiful piece of chamber music in the two middle movements of the Mendelssohn Trio in D minor. I hope that the first and last movements will be added later. I don't think that any pianist is quite so good on the gramophone as Mr. Murdoch, and Mr. Catterall's depth of tone is a great acquisition.

I had intended to give an account of my experiences with various instruments in this quarterly review, but I do not feel that I am able to give the considered judgment I ought to give until I have had further opportunities of testing them in solitude. I know that our readers are all agog for our opinion of the new Columbia machine. My first impression is of extreme brilliance, and I should be tempted to call it the Steinway of gramophones, but I am hoping to have one of the instruments sent to me out of London so that I can test it at leisure. This also applies to the Duophone, of which we gave a preliminary notice last month. Just before I left town I had the opportunity of trying the Tremusa instrument with the ingenious repeating device. I had already heard the Three Muses sound-box, which is the same, and I had been particularly impressed by its reproduction of strings and sopranos. Next month I hope to give my impression of these instruments in greater detail.

The best orchestral records for the third quarter of 1923: Tchaikovsky's *Pathetic Symphony* (H.M.V. D.713-717).

The best chamber music records: Haydn's *Quartet in E flat*, Op. 64, No. 6 (Col. 937, 938).

The best vocal record: *Hagen's Watch* and *Hagen's Call* (*Gotterdämmerung*) sung by Norman Allin (Col. L.1488).

The best band record: *Maximilian Robespierre Overture*, National Military Band, conducted by A. W. Ketelbey (Col. 928). Z.

Again we go late to press, and must ask our steadily increasing host of supporters to forgive us. We do our best, but we are hard put to it to cope with the rising tide! Last month we were out of print in two days, and now the second edition is exhausted; and we have no more copies of No. 2 or No. 4. Whether this is a confession of want of foresight or a claim to a prodigious success, we leave our readers to decide.

"Gramophone Nights," the joint production of the Editor and Mr. Archibald Marshall, is being published to-day by Messrs. Heinemann (5/- net). It consists in a series of 31 programmes, compiled by one or other of the authors, with notes and explanations, and with an introduction by each. We shall not, of course, venture to review it in THE GRAMOPHONE, but we hope that it may inspire some of our critical readers to do this for us, and to find in the various programmes a starting-point for interesting discussions and suggestions.

# Verses to the Editor of the Gramophone

By Oliver St. John Gogarty.

*The immemorial decency of Death  
Was silence ; but it is no longer true :  
For who can say now "With his latest breath  
He parted," when his words thou canst renew ?  
Aye ; and canst make them last and later, latest,  
When on his record with thy "style" thou gratest,  
Bringing Life's platitudes back o'er the Border ?  
"The rest is—" What ? Implacable Recorder !*

*There was a time before thy style was set,  
And Life was merry and the Muse was new,  
When on the banks of Isis first we met  
And unrepeated airs around us blew,  
And auburn was thine high inventive cranium.  
Little I thought it dreamt of a millennium :  
From the two Hinkseys to the two Havannas  
Affirming negatives about bananas !*

*Think, in those States, so much worse than the first,  
How cheerful will the graveyards soon become  
With epitaphs that into song will burst,  
Making a noisy nightmare of the tomb ;  
When every vault, endowed for gramophoning,  
The records of the dead will keep intoning ;  
Telling, perchance, how poppa swelled the till  
In quaint redundant Copperanopolisville.*

*These sinister streaks which mark your monstrous obols,  
These contra-sunwise circles which you shove  
Under a moving finger no man hobbles,  
These discs by which Apollo slays his love—  
Is there no where to flee from them ? No isle has  
As choice a well as that which rescued Hylas,  
When Hylas could not hear his Master's voices ;  
To listen half in love with Death the choice is.*

*Unless, unless you make (to break a record)  
A record of the tune that Nero played  
When Rome was turned to building lots, and flickered ;  
Or what the Sirens sang, or Helen said ;  
Or something winsome Winston left in shadow ;  
A Limerick of the Unknown Soldier's widow ;  
Something one might accumulate some pelf on ;  
Or, failing these, then why not put yourself on ?*

# A Musical Autobiography (continued)

By Compton Mackenzie

THE Promenade Concerts at Queen's Hall have always seemed to me to express with the significance of a mighty group of sculpture an eternal gesture of humanity. In their unchanging manifestation of a phase of men's essential unanimity, in their capacity for evoking emotion from the mere spectacle of so many hundreds of people gathered together for one purpose, they exceed anything that I have ever beheld, whether in a cathedral it was some solemn and simultaneous gesture of worship or at a political gathering the spontaneous display of popular desire. They possess that enchanted tranquillity of action crystallised by art which expresses in stillness the moment of its most intense activity. They possess the quality of those immortal petrifications of sublime motion like the frieze of the Parthenon and the dance of the three Graces in the *Primavera* ; or that incom-

municable poignancy of stilled life that Keats nearly recaptured in his *Grecian Urn*, and perhaps more successfully in that wonderful fragment of the *Ode to Maia*.

I write these words fresh from revisiting the Promenade Concerts after a long interval of years. Beyond the fact that it now costs twice as much to stand in the Promenade as in days gone by, and that I could no longer perceive an egg-headed oboe player whose humptiness-and-dumptiness was always curiously accentuated by the expression forced upon it by his instrument (ah, and I missed a violoncellist of supercilious and celestial exterior), I could detect no change. The very coffee that was served in the bar during the interval might have been brewed twenty years ago and warmed up for the evening. As for Sir Henry Wood he looked if anything younger than twenty years ago ; and when one

evening Sir Edward Elgar's thrilling arrangement of Bach's great fugue in C minor for orchestra was applauded and applauded again and Sir Henry Wood turning to the audience announced that he would have great pleasure in giving an encore of the piece in a few days' time, I felt that if he had announced that he would have great pleasure in giving an encore of the fugue five hundred years hence, he would not have been overestimating either his longevity or his youthfulness. On one of my visits I sat on the water-pipes in the corridor with Mr. Cuthbert Whitemore, the conductor of the *Æolian* Orchestra, and listened to the Franck symphony gramophonically, or in other words through the door between the corridor and the centre of the hall. As one who enjoys Franck more than any other musician except Beethoven himself I was naturally anxious that we should have the Franck symphony on the gramophone if possible. Mr. Whitemore was afraid that it would not come off, but I argued that it would come off quite well enough to make it worth while doing.

On another evening I sat luxuriously in the circle close to the orchestra, so that I could watch the hands of the players in I forget which concerto of Bach for three pianos. It was then that I confirmed the absence of the egg-headed oboe player and saw in his place the brother of Eugene Goossens, a real master of his difficult instrument, who played upon it all through the Seventh Symphony as deftly and as beautifully as a faun. This second visit was my last, for I never had time to go again and sit where I once used to sit (*cheu fugaces!*) twenty years ago in a corner of the upper circle, omnipotent and omniscient as Zeus himself gazing down upon this poor earth from the summit of high Olympus. But now, as I think of myself sitting up there twenty years ago, I suddenly remember that there is one great change in the orchestra which I have only just realised, and that is the introduction of a number of women into the strings. I cannot pretend that this innovation delights me any more than it delights me to see Oxford profaned—I will use no weaker word—by petticoated undergraduates who ride ungracefully on bicycles and wear black sponge-bags upon their heads. If women are going to play in orchestras, I do wish that they would not wear low-necked dresses and leave their arms bare, for by so doing they destroy all the beautiful black and white austerity that ought to make an orchestra resemble an immense pianoforte come to life. Incidentally I noticed with disapproval that several of the male players were dressed more suitably for golf than for music. This may seem fractious criticism; but the loss of external decorum implies a deplorable indifference to form which is our besetting sin in modern art. I should not mind the orchestra's donning tweeds, or even pyjamas, to play most contemporary music; but I do strongly

object to Bach in anything but the orthodox black and white of evening-dress. My readers will be thinking that I am trying to turn the Promenade Concerts into an entertainment for the eye; but I sincerely believe that despite a little exaggeration I am giving utterance to a profoundly just criticism of the circumstances of modern art. However, that is enough of such a topic for the present. Let me get back twenty years and find myself seated in a corner of the upper circle, having paid my two shillings (it was not so easy to find that amount in those days) and taken up my place on the conductor's right hand while the huge hall was still empty. I had come up from the country to spend August in London where that stale month may best be spent. I had played the *Pathetic* Symphony at least a hundred times, perhaps more, on that ridiculous instrument the *Æolian*, and I was now for the first time to hear it played by an orchestra. I am glad that chance has brought my musical autobiography to this point at this moment, because it happened that this very last August His Master's Voice brought out the complete version of the *Pathetic* played by the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra and conducted by Sir Landon Ronald, and in this very month of October the Columbia Company has brought out another version not quite so complete played by the Queen's Hall Orchestra and conducted by Sir Henry Wood. No doubt elsewhere the comparative merits of these two versions will be discussed; at the moment I am not occupied with the gramophone but with the music itself. I am fully aware how dangerous it is for a writer to attempt to put into words what any particular piece of music means to him. I am fully aware that such an attempt is liable to be as wearisome a failure as an attempt to relate what struck one as such an amusing dream the night before. The complete unification of form and matter in music means to say that every individual will derive from it an individual impression so intensely peculiar to himself that he cannot hope to generalise that impression. At the same time, a composer like Tchaikovsky has expressed so perfectly that *fin-de-siècle* weariness at the close of the nineteenth century, a weariness from which many of us in our adolescence found it hard to extricate ourselves, that even at the risk of boring my readers I must make some attempt to express what this particular symphony sounded for my inner ear, because Tchaikovsky had an emotional influence that if not quite comparable with the influence of Rousseau was certainly as great as Byron's a century later. *Vesti la giubba!* I no longer believe that the tragic bassoon which groans forth during the introduction its protest against the unendurable complexity of modern life is really tragic. I believe now that it is merely neurasthenic, which is not quite the same thing. But twenty years ago, when those lugubrious strains pierced the

blue haze of the tobacco smoke and reached my heart, how truly tragic that bassoon was! I know now that what it really reached was my solar plexus, and I know now that the whining melody on the strings which repeats and repeats itself through the first movement was not so much charged with all the human grief that ever was, as with a kind of epileptic irritability of mind. But twenty years ago, all sorrow, all hope deferred, all the tragic sense of human failure,

“Where Youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies,  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,”

was in the first movement of the Pathetic Symphony, and if I wanted to heap the Pelion of neurotic prose upon the Ossa of neurotic music, could I not go home when the concert was finished and read Dostoievsky until the sparrows chirped in a dripping London dawn, and in the yard of the London General Omnibus Company behind my room inspectors jangled bells and tested the steps of those vehicles that already seem remote as mammoths? It is all very well to laugh at the shrouded and confused horizons of youth, but when one looks back on them now they appear more romantic, more beautiful, more fraught with magical potentialities than the clear-cut, heavy, thunderous horizons of middle-age. And so why should I not go on believing that bassoon to be a tragic bassoon, and believing that melody so many times repeated to be a wail and not a whine, and believing that my heart is still being played upon by the tears of things and that my solar plexus is not being troubled by uncomfortably low vibrations and that the first movement of the Pathetic Symphony does express grief and not merely a grievance?

But if the first movement led one's imagination through dripping, grey, and hopeless dawns, through what sombre and subtle twilights was one led by the second movement! In those days it was the fashion for writers whether of verse or prose to perceive in the barrel-organ one of the great illus-

trators of human emotion, and by how many French symbolists, and by how many English decadents was a barrel-organ playing at twilight held up as the most intimate expression of human heartbreak! I am sure that the barrel-organ which served Huysmans, Mallarmé, Laforgue, Verlaine, Arthur Symons, George Moore, and I know not how many more besides, always played the second movement of the Pathetic Symphony. Shortly after the piccolo, like a romantic errand-boy, has gone whistling past in the twilight we hear that tragic bassoon again, trying to interrupt the barrel-organ by wishing that it had never been born. Twenty years ago I thought that the pizzicato note on the violins which brings the movement to a conclusion was as dramatically inevitable as the click of the shears of Atropos, but now when I listen to it I sometimes wonder if it was not the click of Tchaikovsky's tongue in his cheek.

Even in the relatively cheerful third movement Tchaikovsky manages to convey an impression of the human soul's imprisonment in modern life, and to make its cheerfulness resemble the cheerfulness of a squirrel running round and round in its wheel. And if for a moment the audience is allowed to cherish an illusion of human joy circumscribed though it be, the gloom of the last movement is as gloomy as anything could be. And gloomiest of all is that tragic bassoon, again making as shamelessly direct an appeal to the human emotions as a lame beggar outside a cathedral, or as that to me truly disgusting writer, W. N. Barbellion. The margin of security in such art is a small one, and though Tchaikovsky does just manage to keep physical nausea out of his music, the same cannot be said for Sibelius whose *False Triste* has exactly the same effect on me as the noise of vomiting heard through the murk of a cross-channel passage. However, this is enough of my autobiography for this month, and the further discussion of Tchaikovsky's direct appeal must stand over.

(To be continued.)

Mr. Claude Verity, who has been so successful in his experiments towards simultaneous recording and filming, invited us to hear the latest model that he has made of his Verityphone—generally known as “the gramophone that breathes”—just before he started for America with it in October. The Verityphone is in the nature of a parergon undertaken in order to perfect the reproduction of the human voice—so that the result of filming and recording singers or speakers might be a satisfying illusion; and the essence of it lies in the circulation of warm air from sound-box to amplifier, so as to imitate more closely the human vocal organs. The

clarifying and strengthening of the tones of the human voice were remarkable; such patient and ingenious experiments as Mr. Verity has made are extremely valuable; and we ventured in congratulating him to ask him to devote his attentions to the elimination of the scratch which at present is as much clarified and strengthened by his process as the voice! That, we maintain, is the urgent problem for experimenters (see the note on Professor McKendrick's rather Heath-Robinonesque scheme on page 90), and Mr. Verity is sanguine about his prospects of solving it in the near future.—*Qui vivra verra!*

## EPIGRAMOPHONES—III.

By HILAIRE BELLOC.

*In Freer Climes, when Music's hard to bear  
 Books, Bricks and Cats go hurtling thro' the air.  
 But by the Gramophone's discordant disc  
 The patient listener runs no sort of risk.*

# NEEDLE ANGLE, NEEDLES, AND WEAR ON RECORDS

By Captain H. T. Barnett, M.I.E.E.

**A**T the outset, I must say all my remarks are made pre-supposing you will use and test all needles, except fibre needles, which need a steeper angle, at the sliding angle of 45 degrees instead of at the digging angle of 60 degrees—that is to say like this  not like this  The advantages of the sliding angle over the digging angle are very great, there is less surface noise, much less wear on the record, just as much tone, and every bit as good definition.

### THE DIAMOND.

A diamond stylus is used in Edison "Recreation" machines. It makes a lot of surface noise, and is expensive to replace; but wear on the records is very small. The tone is small compared with that obtainable from the same machine with a needle sound-box and records.

### THE SAPPHIRE.

Pathé machines have a round pointed sapphire stylus. It makes a good deal of surface noise, but used at 45 degrees angle produces, so far as I can find out, no wear on the records at all. The tone is less than from an ordinary needle sound-box and records, and it is reedy in character.

### FIBRE NEEDLES.

Prices of these vary a good deal, but all those I have tried seem to be very good. They must be used at a steep angle owing to the short angles of the points. They wear the record very little, especially if it be polished with one of the record polishing substances now on the market. They produce very little surface noise even on badly worn records. They favour the tone of all percussion instruments and of all plectrum instruments. The point being relatively wide cannot follow the tiny sinuosities made by very high notes and by the valuable harmonic overtones that build up tone

characteristic; vocal character and the character of many instruments is therefore lost. Do not get your sound-box cut for fibre needles, it is much better to use an adapter, because then you can always put your needles in so that only just the point projects, with the result that you always get a good big tone. I like the ordinary sixpenny adapter better than any of the patented ones, because it is short.

I have some exceptionally vigorous records that break the point off a fibre needle very quickly; a badly worn record, unless polished, will soon wear away a point.

All the fibre needle cutters I have seen work well.

Now that one can get fine steel needles that do not wear the record at all, I regard the fibre needle as being just as obsolete as the Sapphire or the Diamond; except perhaps for the use of those unfortunate people who have goose neck, oblong rectangular horn, louvre fronted, raucous toned machines, and who will welcome anything that makes the tone produced less ear splitting.

### ORDINARY STEEL NEEDLES.

With these, in my opinion, everything depends upon the shape of the point. Needles with straight sided points, and especially those with short, straight sided points, make too much surface noise, and wear a record very quickly. I like the H.M.V. loud and medium needles better than any I have yet tried; they have nice points with curved sides.

On my own machine, with a heavy sound-box and straight tone arm, Columbia and Regal records wear best with this class of needle. I should then bracket together Aeolian, Aeo, Beltona, Coliseum, V.F., Guardsman, Scala, and the recent Homochord records, after which, and in the order mentioned, I should put Winner, Zonophone, and H.M.V.

#### WIRE POINTED NEEDLES.

No maker has taken up the challenge I threw down last year. I cannot hear any praise of them at all.

#### SEMI-PERMANENT NEEDLES.

With these, as with ordinary steel needles, a good deal depends upon the shape of the point. I know a needle of this kind and made of good hard steel, but having a straight-sided point, that ruins a record for my ears in only a single playing. Do not buy semi-permanent needles with straight-sided points. The surface noise from this class of needle is about the same as from an ordinary steel needle, but the wear on the record is in some cases greater. A needle of this kind that has a well-shaped point and favours the life of the record is the "Petmecky"; use each needle for six runnings and turn it over between runnings. If used on an already worn record it is noisy, but if you start records with it and stick to it you will get vigorous tone and a surface noise similar to that from a sapphire. You can cut a piece of glass with one if you wish, they are so hard.

#### FINE NEEDLES.

During the war, and when it was very difficult to get my favourite needles, even at 2s. a box, I was passing along Holborn one day when on leave, and saw in a shop window there some packets of needles marked "medium tone," and priced at 1s. for 200. I do not like medium tone needles; even in those days I had made my gramophone give a pure tone, and I wanted as much of it as I could get, but being almost out of needles I bought a few packets. When opened I found they were thin short needles much like the end cut off a darning needle, and I felt disappointed; but when I came to try them, I found their shortness allowed them to be put up into the needle socket so far that only about one-eighth of an inch of the point was outstanding, and when used on the record in this way they gave nearly a loud tone and very little surface noise. The points were a good shape, and before this first supply ran out, it was clearly evident they produced very little wear on the record. So long as the shop had them (which must have been for a couple of years) I continued to buy a supply whenever in town.

Last spring I noticed a pictorial advertisement of the "Sympathetic Needle," and remembering my war-time experience with fine needles, I was at once interested. Determining to test the needle out fully, especially in regard to wear on records (as I had tested the "Petmecky" needle), I got a needle outfit and two quite new pianoforte records of Marie Novello's *Pas des Amphores*. One of the needle records I played continuously with ordinary needles, and in less than an hour, for my ear, it was practically finished. The other I played continuously with "Sympathetic" needles eighty times, using

two double-ended needles in the process. At the end of this test, *so far as my eye and my ear could judge, the record was quite new*. And there had been no more surface noise than from a fibre needle!

The importance of this discovery overwhelmed me.

It is true I could not get so much tone as with some loud needles, but the tone was sufficient for many peoples' requirements; it was more than I could get from a fibre needle, it was more than I could get from my Pathé box and records, and it was perfect tone with both vocal and instrumental character completely preserved.

During last winter I had been recommending both the fibre needle and the Pathé system, because they made one's purchase of records an investment and not an expenditure, and now I saw that both these systems, so far as their main recommendation was concerned, were entirely obsolete. Who would endure the noise of the diamond or the sapphire; who would bother with troublesome fibre, when their needle cut records could be almost everlasting, when they could play for an hour with a single needle point, when they could have hardly any surface noise at all?

See what a factor this needle is toward the musical education of the masses. Instead of buying poor records, they can now well afford to buy an occasional good one, ever increasing, even if slowly, their unworn and substantially new stock. Even H.M.V. Celebrity records, with the exception of a few in which there is a tendency to develop chatter on some high notes, stand the fine needle well. The only record whose composition seems unsuited to it is the Zonophone; on my machine they do not last too well, but they stand better with the fine needle than with any other.

Improvement in fine needles still continues. Last month I tested an advance packet of "Euphonic" needles and adapter with a very trying piano record of particularly vigorous tone. At the end of the test the used side of the record was not only not worn, *but it showed a better burnish than the unused side*. The adapter is made so that when the needle is pushed right home the point only stands out one-sixteenth of an inch, and one gets as much tone as from an ordinary loud needle; it is nice to catch hold of, and there is ample bearing for the thread of the screw.

Now just one word of warning about records. If one finds any tendency to chatter developing, stop using the fine needle at once for that record, and use the "Petmecky." Also, if you get a record cut with a blunt stylus, and in which the point of the needle vibrates across the bottom of the groove, do not go on using the fine needle for this.

Brand new records are always a little unkind to a needle; I only use a point five times on new records. With records in normal playing condition I use each point twenty times; roughly, for an hour.

# Columbia Records

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BETTER THAN ANY.

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**L1504** { Song of the Volga Boatmen (In English) . . . . . Norman Allin, Bass. When a Maiden Takes Your Fancy, from "Il Seraglio," (Mozart) (In English) . . . . .

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**D1460** { TO JULIA (Song Cycle) (Quilter). 1—The Bracelet; 2—(a) The Maiden Blush; (b) Julia's Hair . . . . . Hubert Eisdell, Tenor,

**D1461** { 3—To Daisies . . . . . 4—The Night Piece . . . . . with String Quartette, directed by Roger Quilter.

**D1462** { 5—(a) Interlude; (b) Cherry Ripe . . . . . Go, Lovely Rose. . . . . Hubert Eisdell, Tenor.

**D1463** { TOSCA—E lucevan le stelle (In Italian) . . . . . CARMEN—Flower Song (In Italian) . . . . . Ulysses Lappas, Tenor.

**D1464** { LILAC TIME—The Flower . . . . . LILAC TIME—The Golden Song . . . . . Duets: Dora Labbette and Hubert Eisdell.

## All Columbia Records

# GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)

## By F. SHARP

**A**N enthusiastic biographer has said, "There is no need to ask 'Who is Verdi ?' He is that Italian master who has put a girdle of melody literally round the world." Delete that dangerous word "literally" and the writer is not far from the truth. I suppose no one has ever been more richly endowed with melodic sense, and certainly no one has poured forth through a long life so generous a flow of tunes ranging from the depths of banality to the very pinnacle of poetic inspiration. His first taste of music is said to have been a barrel-organ, and this is not without significance. It must have been a meagre and a tinkling tune that drew him out on to the dusty white roads round Le Roncole ; but it was a tune, and that was why he followed it. Even the feeble music of the village church enchanted him, and the organ drove him into such a state of ecstasy that he forgot everything else and was once knocked senseless down the altar steps by the priest for neglecting his duties as server.

The flower of Verdi's genius bloomed for the first few years of his life almost untended. A more unprofitable soil could hardly be imagined than that poor village at the foot of the Apennines. It is true that the Italian is born with music in his soul, and no doubt most of Giuseppe's friends chanted their melancholy songs on the hillside as all Italian peasants do. That primitive expression of emotion was probably his daily musical food, varied by the barrel-organ, and a travelling fiddler who is reputed to have persuaded the elder Verdi to buy a spinet for his son. The Verdis seem to have been ready to indulge his musical inclinations. They had, no doubt, as *padroni* of the village inn and shop, a nice little sum put by, and some of this was spent on the spinet which Verdi kept to the end of his life. On this he picked out the common chord of C major one day, and the next was found kicking the instrument to pieces because he had lost it again. Such enthusiasm was not to be denied, and the next step was the church organ, which he learned to such effect that at ten years old he was appointed organist. This was the height of his parents' ambition for him, musically, for music as a career had probably never occurred to them ; but fortunately his good genius, who had been lurking cheerfully in the background from the beginning, now appeared on the scene in his true character. This was Barezzi, a merchant of Busseto, the neighbouring town, from whom Carlo Verdi used to buy his stock. Barezzi was a fine fellow, and, what was best of all, an accomplished musician. He not only was president of the Busseto Philharmonic Society, but he played the flute, clarionet, French horn and ophicleide

with distinction. He may be considered the most important influence in Verdi's life, for he revealed to him the classics, and got him into the true musical atmosphere for which he had perhaps unconsciously been pining. It was through Barezzi that at eighteen he was able to go to Milan, and, though he failed to get into the Conservatoire, his musical life began in earnest.

It is interesting to know that he fell in love with Barezzi's daughter, Margherita, and that Barezzi, with characteristic generosity, allowed the marriage with the penniless young musician to take place. Just when Verdi, after a hard struggle in Milan, had signed a contract for three operas, his wife and their two children died with tragic suddenness, and, being obliged to stem the tide of bills that was pouring in, he finished the first opera of his contract, *Un Giorno di Regno*, a comedy. It is not surprising to know that it was a failure.

The life of so great a worker as Verdi is hardly interesting outside his works. From this moment his life was in fact his work, and even those who scoff at his music must admit that he was at any rate one of the most astonishing phenomena in the musical or any other world. It is easy, much too easy, to sneer at Verdi. Of course, some of his music is absurd, and some of it is very boring, and lots of it is very noisy when it is screamed by tenors and sopranos who are afraid they will not be heard above the din made by each other. Let us admit that it is full of offences against good taste, that it plagiarises itself over and over again, that it sometimes is flimsy and theatrical. The worst has then been said. Verdi was composing operas for 50 years. The first of these ten years saw ten operas produced, one each year. *Nabucodonosor*, *Ernani* and *I Lombardi* are the survivors of this period. The rest, except for a few isolated numbers, are forgotten. In the next ten years followed a succession of masterpieces. *Luisa Miller* was the stepping stone between these two periods. In this opera, which is taken from Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, he gets away from noisy orchestral effects, and adopts a simple lyrical style with graceful phrasing and an almost unbroken flow of melody. That there are boring moments in this work no one can deny. Two heavy basses assert themselves in endless duets of ferocious dullness, and it is not surprising that it has dropped out of most répertoires, though there are still some lovely songs to be heard out of it. Then follows that astounding trio *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*, all of which can be said to have proved their immortality. *Vespri Siciliani*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Il Ballo in Maschera* completed this decade.

In the next ten years there are two operas, *La Forza del Destino* and *Don Carlos*. Four years after the latter comes *Aida*, then, after sixteen years' silence, comes *Otello*, and lastly, after six years, *Falstaff*.

This long list in itself is a remarkable achievement for one lifetime, and I have quoted it at length and with little comment to enforce my argument that it is useless and foolish to sneer at Verdi. If his art had gone on in a crescendo of excellence till he reached *Trovatore*, and then had gradually declined as he approached a dignified old age full of honours, we should still revere his memory as a great man; but he did much more than that. For him there was no downhill. His was a steady ascent, till in his 82nd year he produced his finest work, *Falstaff*, a comic opera in which he and his librettist interpret to perfection the spirit of Shakespeare.

One of the remarkable features of Verdi's later life was his instant enthusiasm for Wagner. While the rest of the world was wrangling over this revolutionary, Verdi, steeped though he was in the Italian tradition, hailed him as the genius of his day. There are traces of Wagnerian influence in the dramatic construction of *Falstaff*, but a far more powerful influence on Verdi was the collaboration of Arrigo Boito. Verdi had throughout his career been harassed by libretti of incredible fatuity, which fact no one realised better than himself. Many a lonely hour was spent by Piave, his chief and probably his worst librettist, locked behind a door, the key of which Verdi carried in his pocket, trying to instil a little life and sense into some particularly jejune "*strofa*." Verdi's severity on these occasions was mitigated at the end of the imprisonment by generous payment, and even if it had not been, the harshest treatment could not have altered the passionate devotion of Piave for his "*caro Maestro*." It must have been a blessed relief to Verdi when the manuscript of *Otello* came into his hands. He had already had a taste of Boito's work, for he had rewritten *Simon Boccanegra* in 1881, six years before the production of *Otello*. At last he had found his ideal collaborator, who instead of persistently trying to drag him down to the depths, rose with him to artistic heights of which Verdi himself had hardly dared to dream.

No composer has ever understood the human voice more completely than Verdi. He never forgot its limitations, and never demanded more of it than it could do. The only exception to this is, perhaps, the rôle of *Otello*, which is a severe strain for most singers; but *Otello* was written for Tamagno, who, as everyone knows, had a voice of exceptional power and range. Though Verdi did not demand too much, he demanded one thing absolutely, and that was *bel canto*. There is no severer test for the quality of a voice than one of his simple little *arias* with a rum-ti-tum accompaniment. They sound so easy,

but are full of pitfalls for the ill-placed voice. When they are badly sung they sound like nothing at all, but such songs as *Il Baleno* and *Di Provenza* from *Trovatore* and *La Traviata* are shining gems when sung by such artists as Battistini and De Luca. The modern idea that the voice is merely one of the instruments in opera and of no more importance than an oboe or a piccolo would not have appealed to Verdi, nor, one would imagine, would it appeal to anyone who respected the human voice as the delicate and sensitive thing it is. Chords made of flesh and blood cannot be expected to compete with catgut, nor the human diaphragm with the belly of a violin. There are things you should not ask a voice to do, and the Italians, who worship the voice, are very rightly shocked at the monstrous liberties taken with it by modern composers whose brilliant and often interesting music totally disregards the first principles of vocalisation. Though singers in Wagner's operas have a hard and continuous fight with the orchestra, he at least was considerate enough to pitch the rôles in their proper register, so that as long as they have good lungs and fair general health they can sing Wagner without ruining their voices. Those who carried on the Wagner tradition, however, have less and less studied the possibilities of the voice. An excellent case in point is found in the music of *Hassan*, with its delicate pattern and wonderful orchestration. The Chief Beggar in the House of Moving Walls sings a song that is practically unsingable. The pitch is tenor, but the tamber is baritone. The worst of it is that in songs like this the general public does not realise in the least that the artist has been performing dangerous acrobatic feats, but on the contrary hardly notice that he has been singing at all.

The revival of Mozart leads one to hope that a reaction is coming, for though Mozart did not understand the voice as Verdi did, he at any rate gave it first importance in opera, which it must have if opera is to be performed as it is at present, that is, with the singers on the stage, at least endeavouring to act and enunciate words, and the orchestra outside the range of the footlights and therefore logically in a subordinate position. As soon as the orchestra mounts the stage and plays in the full glare of the footlight with limes playing impartially on them and the singers, then by all means let them all fight it out between them. Till then the voice is unquestionably the thing, and a smattering of Verdi's vast knowledge in our modern composers would greatly ease the path of the interpreters of their music. Watching the struggles of some unhappy artist drowning in a sea of dissonances, snatching at such straws as an occasional note that falls within his range, we should like to cry out with Nietzsche, when he finally fled the Wagnerian influence,

"Il faut mediterraniser la musique!"

The following list of selected records from Verdi's operas does not pretend to do more than give a few recorded examples from each opera which in the writer's opinion indicate most clearly the evolution of Verdi's style. There are so many good Verdi records that it would be a waste of space to attempt a full list. They are therefore chosen for the above reason, and arranged in chronological order, with the date of their production.

*Nabucodonosor*. 1842. *Tremin gl'insani*. Titta Ruffo (H.M.V. 7-52063, red, 10in.).

*I Lombardi*. 1843. *Qual Voluttà*. Caruso, Alda, Journet (H.M.V. 2-054029, green, 12in.). (This is a particularly beautiful record.)

*Ernani*. 1843. *Surta è la notte*. Cavatina. Frieda Hempel (H.M.V. 053265, red, 12in.). *Oh! de' verd' anni miei*. Battistini (H.M.V. 052841, red, 12in.) or De Luca (H.M.V. 2-052118, red, 12in.). *Infelice! è tuo credevi*. Chaliapin (H.M.V. 052389, red, 12in.).

*Macbeth*. 1847. *Pietà, rispetto, amore*. Battistini (H.M.V. 052369, red, 12in.).

*Luisa Miller*. 1849. *Quando le sere al placido*. Bonci (Col. D.8084, light blue, double-sided).

*Rigoletto*. 1851. *Bella figlia dell'amore*. Quartet. Caruso, Galli-Curci, Perini, De Luca (H.M.V. 2-054066, buff, 12in.). (This record, which is in the H.M.V. catalogue as *Un bel dì se ben rammentomi*, is one of the most perfect examples of the vocal quartet in existence.) *Caro Nome*. Barrientos (Col. 7187, purple, single-sided). *La Donna è Mobile*. Caruso (H.M.V. 2-52641, red, 10in.). (This is the song that Verdi kept a secret till the first night of the production, and would not let even the tenor who was to sing it look at it until after the last rehearsal, when he was told to take it home and study it and be sure not even to whistle it in the street. The audience went mad about it and called for it again and again, and in a few months Europe was ringing with this melody which we can hardly believe was ever new.)

*Il Trovatore*. 1853. *Ai nostri monti*. Maria Gay and Zenatello (Col. A. 5370, light blue, double-sided). *Ah! si ben mio coll'essere*. Martinelli (H.M.V. 2-052102, red, 12 in.). *Il balen del suo sorriso*. De Luca (H.M.V. 7-52065, 10in., red, 12in.) or Stracciari (Col. 7164, purple, single-sided). *Miserere*. Emmy Destinn and Zenatello (Col. A.5399, light blue, double).

*La Traviata*. 1853. *Addio del passato*. Galli-Curci (H.M.V. 7-53044, red, 10in.). *Dite alla giovine*. Galli-Curci and De Luca (H.M.V. 2-054099, red, 12in.). *Imponete*. Galli-Curci and De Luca (H.M.V. 2-054089, red, 12in.). *Ah! fors' è lui*. Galli-Curci. (H.M.V. 2-053183, red, 12in.). *Di Provenza*. De Luca (H.M.V. 2-052130, red, 12in.). *De' miei bollenti spiriti*. Martinelli (H.M.V. 2-052128, red, 12in.). (Everyone should possess these six records, which are examples of *bel canto* in its highest perfection.)

*Ballo in Maschera*. 1859. *Alla vita che t'arrida*. Battistini (H.M.V. 052142, red, 12in.). *È scherzo, od è follia*. Quintet. Caruso, Hempel, Duchène, Rothier and Segurola (H.M.V. 2-054050, pale blue, 12in.). *Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima*. De Luca (H.M.V. 2-052127, red, 12in.). *Morro, ma prima in grazia*. Emmy Destinn (H.M.V. 2-053199, red, 12in.). *Saper vorreste*. Selma Kurz (H.M.V. 053275, red, 12in.).

*La Forza del Destino*. 1862. *Invano, Alvaro!* Caruso and Amato (H.M.V. 2-054027, pale green, 12in.). *Solenne in quest' ora*. Caruso and Amato (H.M.V. 054070, pale green, 12in.). *La Vergine degli Angeli*. Rosa Ponselle and Chorus (Col. 7227, purple, 12in.).

*Don Carlos*. 1867. *Dio che nell'alma infondere*. Martinelli and De Luca (H.M.V. 2-054117, buff, 12in.). *Per me giunto è il dì supremo*. Battistini (H.M.V. 2-052208, red, 12in.).

*Aïda*. 1871. *Celeste Aïda*. Martinelli (H.M.V. 2-052100, red, 12in.) or Caruso (H.M.V. 052224, red, 12in.). *Nile Song*. Duet. Stralia and Mullings (Col. 7248 and 7249, purple, 12in.). (The second part is not so good as the first.) *Ritorna Vincitor*. Stralia (Col. 7194, purple, 12in.).

*Falstaff*. 1893. *Onore ladri*. Titta Ruffo (H.M.V. 2-052199, red, 12in.). *Quand'ero paggio*. Titta Ruffo (H.M.V. 7-52224, red, 10in.).

Owing to some misunderstanding we announced last month (p. 83) that the Aeolian Co. was no longer making the Vocalion Portable. This was not correct, apparently. The Vocalion Portable is being made and sold as much as ever, and we regret that it was not sent to us for the tests.

The translations of the words of some of Chaliapin's best records made for this month's Supplement by M. Nicolas Nadegin, the Russian baritone (now singing in *Hassan*), will be found extraordinarily illuminating, if you have hitherto enjoyed *Boris Godounov* without understanding the sense of the words. They are an integral part of the drama. Not so the *Volga Boat Song*, in which the words mean practically nothing! But what a fine song it is, whether chanted as a solo or a chorus! Naturally the news that it is being sung with costume and scenery in the programme of *The Blue Bird* will draw many of our readers, as it drew us, to the New Scala Theatre; and they will not be disappointed. The picturesqueness of the weary figures straining on the rope, grouped against a background of stormy sunset, is as unforgettable as the haunting rise and fall of the chant: and this is only one of a dozen or more songs, scenes and dances, most attractively staged and performed. Perhaps one of our recording companies will be clever enough to secure M. Victor Henkin singing his Caucasian song, *Kasbek*, which surely deserves immortality.

# Gramophone Societies' Reports

## A SURVEY

FROM far and near come in the typewritten or manuscript reports of recording secretaries, all of them no doubt angels of light in the cheerful atmosphere of their society meetings, but rather more formidable to sub-editor and compositor in their guise of recording angels. The season has begun with a good deal of enthusiasm and a good prospect of excelling all previous seasons in popularity and keenness. There is a new gramophone society started at Londonderry, with headquarters at the Melville Hotel, Dr. J. N. McLaughlin as president, Mr. W. L. Phillips as hon. secretary, and Mr. John McAdam as hon. recording secretary; the first gramophone society to be started in Ireland, so they say; or is it only the first in the Six Counties? Anyhow the account of the inaugural meeting on October 1st reads uncommonly well, and after the members had finished congratulating themselves on being there, they listened to an excellent programme of music, passed a very shrewd judgment on the new Columbia surface, and when it came to voting on the records that they had heard gave the vocal prize to Galli-Curci in *Una Voce* and the instrumental to Heifetz in *Ronde des Lutins*. Evidently there is not much wrong with the taste of Londonderry, and we wish the society increase and prosperity every month!

Probably we shall hear of many other new societies in the course of the season; and the fact that the Brixton Gramophone Society and the West London Gramophone Society both report that they are moving to larger halls for their meetings is a healthy sign. I wonder sometimes how many members make a society most agreeably workable? The Glasgow and District G.S. had an audience of 250 in the Ca'doro Restaurant, Union Street, on October 8th; the Bradford and District G. and P.S. "comfortably filled" their new headquarters in the Church House Lecture Hall with 400; while the Hull and District Gramophonic Circle has about 70 members. It would be interesting if every recording secretary would let me have a note of the total membership in his next report.

Before this appears in print, probably most of the societies will have heard the Jewel Sound-box with Nom-y-ka diaphragm, about which Bristol informed us first in July. Already one or two accounts of it have reached me—Messrs. Murdoch, McKillop & Co., Ltd., have provided demonstrations of it in Glasgow and Newcastle and in this connection I might add, for the benefit of London district secretaries, that Mr. A. T. Evans of Messrs.

Murdoch, Murdoch & Co., 461-463, Oxford Street, W. 1, informs me of his willingness to give a demonstration of it to any society, either in its own meeting-place or in his "audition" hall in Oxford Street. The programmes for the next few months that have reached me show how up-to-date and enterprising the officials of all the societies are. The new Columbia Grafonola, the new Columbia records, the Aeo demonstration records keep on recurring in their reports, and like the Athenians they are all after some new thing every month. But this does not in any way interfere with the performance of sound musical programmes; and the amiable rivalry between providers of programmes is a constant impulse towards high standards. Besides this outside help is not wanting. The president of the South London G.S., Mr. Webb, gave the North London P. and G.S. his "second and concluding discourse and demonstration" of sound-boxes on October 18th, and the members of the South-East London Recorded Music Society were delighted by a lecture-demonstration on oratorio given by Mr. Walter Yeomans, the principal of the Education Department of the Gramophone Company. These are excellent indications of the spirit which dominates the G.S. movement.

An interesting point was raised at the annual general meeting of the Liverpool and District G. and P.S. "Very properly a tribute was paid to members of the trade who have on all occasions given of their help and counsel without stint or reservation. A somewhat animated but quite friendly discussion marked the debate on a proposal to allow trade members to share in the government of the society. Under the existing rules dealers are permitted to become members—indeed they are cordially welcomed—but are precluded from holding office. The large majority of members evidently consider this arrangement to be in the best interests of the society and of the traders themselves, as the motion to delete or amend the rule was negatived on being put to the vote." Any comments, please? Is this the rule in most societies?

I regret that it is impossible to find room in this number for the notes from various centres; a précis of them will appear next month. C.

## "GRAMOPHONE TIPS"

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Mr. S. H. Burden (17, Crescent Road, Crouch End, N. 8) has sent us an aluminium diaphragm as fitted to a Saturn and to a Superphone sound-box. We have not been able to test them properly yet, but those who possess either a Saturn or a Superphone, and who are sharing the prevalent idea that the day of the mica diaphragm is over, would be well advised to communicate with Mr. Burden.

We have received a box of "Xylopin" wood needles from Mr. Wilensky (43, London Wall) for trial, and they certainly seem to be better than fibre needles and probably as harmless to the record —no small consideration at the present time. They can be recommended to those who prefer to sacrifice brilliance and subtlety to mellowness and suavity.

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# REVIEW OF RECORDS

**VOCALION.**—D.02107.—**Jelly d'Aranyi and Adela Fochiri** (two Violinists) (piano accompaniment **Ethel Hobday**) : **Concerto in D Minor for two Violins** (Bach), 7s. 6d.

This is one of the most admirable records that has been published for some time. The d'Aranyi sisters play Bach with understanding and mastery, and the record, on two very well-covered sides of a double-sided 12-in. record, contains much more material than the corresponding old Kreisler-Zimbalist record. The latter two, though a beautiful record for its time, has a surface which is not up to modern standards. The Aeolian Company, about whose surface we have had occasion sometimes to say hard things, has suddenly this month produced records whose surface is quite irreproachable. It is precisely in records like the present one that it is so desirable that scratch should be eliminated, and I must congratulate the company on having produced a double-sided record with a perfect surface of a great piece of music by first-rate players at a reasonable price.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—D.744.—**Symphony Orchestra, Albert Coates** : **Tod und Verklärung, Op. 24** (Strauss), 6s. 6d. each.

Herr Richard Strauss's famous piece of programme music is not very well suited for reproduction on the gramophone. Depending as it does for its effects mainly on certain orchestral subtleties, it is apt to miss its aim when these subtleties are lost, as they so often are in the present state of the recording art. I confess to a want of sympathy with most of Strauss's music. It seems to me nerve-racking, cold-blooded and essentially lacking in invention. It is extremely clever. He works up a great deal of exasperating and exciting noise out of a very little and rather commonplace melodic material, and the general impression I get from his music is that it is what used in old days to be called "fin de siècle." The records in themselves are excellent, and I make my confession of what I think of the music in order that those who like it may make the proper allowances for my want of enthusiasm.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—2-022024.—**Smirnoff** (Tenor) ; **Chanson Georgienne** (Rachmaninoff), 7s. 6d.

Mr. Smirnoff has a typically Russian voice, and was indeed one of the favourite singers of his native country. I have always felt a certain strangeness in his singing of numbers from Italian and French operas. In this record he sings an exquisite Russian song, and the result is very beautiful. The excellence of the accompaniment should be noticed. The song has, however, already been sung perfectly in English by McCormack as "Oh, cease thy singing, maiden fair."

**VOCALION.**—X.9197.—**Raymond Ellis** (Baritone) : **Der Yuslm!** (Rumhsky) ; **Yom Kippur**, 4s.

Jewish singing is nearly always interesting, as the idiom is different from that of occidental music. Occasionally the synagogue music rises to or, should I say, abases itself in an abandonment to emotion that reminds one of the painting of a certain Byzantine school, an abandonment that is disquieting and even horrifying, and that suggests a primitive tradition. These two records do not take one far from our common ground, but they are odd and interesting and are well sung and recorded.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—08129.—**Flonzaley Quartet** : **Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4** (second movement) Scherzto (Beethoven), 7s. 6d.

The incomparable Flonzaley Quartet gives us a movement from Beethoven's early Op. 18. They play it divinely and the recording is very good indeed. If only we were as well provided with Beethoven's later chamber music as we are with the earlier!

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—3-07967.—**Mme. Chemet** (Violin) : **Rondo** (Mozart-Kreisler), 7s. 6d.

This rondo has been recorded several times, and once lately by Heifetz. I haven't Heifetz's record by me, but, listening to Mme. Chemet's performance, it would be hard to imagine a better. I have an idea though that Heifetz got a rather fuller tone.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—D.741, D.742.—**The Beatrice Hewitt Piano Quartet** : **Piano Quartet in C Minor** (Fauré), 6s. 6d.

The Fauré Quartet is a piece of music that should be heard often in order to be appreciated. Fauré was perhaps not a great

musician, but his music has a wandering and indeterminate beauty that is often extremely moving, and there are moments when it is really exquisite. The records are wonderful from the point of view of reproduction, the piano tone being exceptionally faithful.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—D.739.—**Tudor Davies** (Tenor) : **All hail, thou dwelling pure** (from **Faust**) (Gounod) ; **See here thy floweret**, from **Carmen** (Bizet), 6s. 6d.

Mr. Davies has a beautiful voice, though on the records it is inclined to sound throaty. It is a pity that these songs are sung in English, as the English language seems to denaturalise French songs to an incredible degree. Mr. Davies has the virus of Wagner in his blood, and singing in English encourages him, too, to sing everything as though it were part of the "Ring." It is, however, an excellent thing that such good records of these two songs are obtainable at so reasonable a price as the new His Master's Voice figure for double-sided Black Label records.

**VOCALION.**—A.0197.—**Scotney** (Soprano) ; **Il dolce suono**, from **Lucia di Lammermoor** (Donizetti), 8s.

The "Mad Scene" from "Lucia" is the one aria that all coloratura singers must give us, and a good way of comparing such singers is to obtain all the innumerable records of the famous aria. Miss Scotney's rendering is among the best. Her voice has not quite the divine ease and sweetness of Galli-Curci's, nor has she the attack and robustness of Barrientos, but she is certainly one of the half-dozen best sopranos of the present day. The recording is excellent.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—2-082072.—**Ansseau** (Tenor) ; **Nature Immense**, from **La Damnation de Faust** (Berlioz), 7s. 6d.

M. Ansseau does his best with this terribly difficult and unsingable song. He has a delicious light tenor voice, but Berlioz treats the voice (in this song, at least) with as little consideration as Wagner at his most Wagnerian; and the result is not very agreeable to the ear, especially on a gramophone record where setting and dramatic gestures have to be left out.

**VOCALION.**—L.5036.—**Elena Gerhardt** (Soprano) ; **Der Tod und das Mädchen** (Schubert), 5s. 6d.

Another exquisite Schubert song by Mme. Gerhardt. Everyone who is keen on *lieder* should have this record as well as its forerunners in the series of Mme. Gerhardt's records.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—2-3778.—**Frieda Hempel** (Soprano) ; **Phyllis hath such charming graces** (Arr., Lane Wilson), 5s. 6d.

Mme. Hempel is always a delightful singer, and there is no need to say more than that this is one of the most delicate of her lighter songs. My example of the record showed a slight tendency to rattle on the highest notes when a loud needle was used.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—D.738.—**Rosina Buckman** (Soprano) ; **Ave Maria** (Kahn) ; **Waiata Maori** (Hill).

The songs chosen are not intensely interesting. Mme. Rosina Buckman has an exceptionally beautiful voice, and I hope many double-sided records of more interesting songs will be published.

**VOCALION.**—R.6119.—**Amadio** (Flute) ; **Faust Fantaisia** (Gounod-de-Jong), 5s. 6d.

Much like most flute records—brilliant fireworks. One of the things most needed is a series of records of the great music that has been written for the flute.

**VOCALION.**—D.02106.—**Tertis and Hobday** (Viola and Piano) : **Sonata in C Minor, Op 45, 2nd movement** (Greig).

The same remarks apply to this as to the first part, which was reviewed in our last number. The recording is excellent.

**VOCALION.**—B.3039.—**Roland Hayes** (Tenor) : **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot** (Burleigh), 6s.

This nigger spiritual I find more pleasing than any of the others that have been recorded except *Go down, Moses*. Mr. Hayes is less mannered in his singing of it than he has sometimes shown himself.

(Columbia Records and also my list of Selected Records unavoidably held over till next month.)

JAMES CASKETT.

**BRUNSWICK RECORDS.**—Unfortunately we have only received a small selection from the first batch of Brunswick records which the Clifophone department of Messrs. Chappell put on the market in October; but they give a foretaste of what we may expect—some really valuable additions to the library. The recording is extremely good, Huberman's playing of the *Ballade* and *Polonaise* of Vieuxtemps (violin with piano accompaniment) being especially brilliant (50019; 12-inch Gold Label, 8s.). Mario Chamlee, sometimes called the greatest English-singing tenor, makes a start with *Agnus Dei* (Bizet) and *Ave Maria* (Kahn) (50021; 12-inch Gold Label, 8s.), and though his high notes may give a moment's anxiety, the ease of his singing, the sympathetic accompaniment, and the excellent recording whet the appetite for more examples of his art. In this record, as apparently in most of his records in the American Brunswick catalogue, he challenges comparison with Caruso; just as the New York String Quartette makes its *début* with two movements from the Dvorak *Quartet in F Major* (25015; 12-inch Violet, 6s. 6d.), the Lento of which has already been done by the Flonzaley Quartet. But at the price it is worth having.

We welcome and congratulate the Brunswick records, and hope soon to hear also Michael Bohnen, the baritone, in Wagner and Lauri-Volpi, the Neapolitan tenor, Elly Wey on the piano, and many others new to the English gramophone public. The Brunswick surface is too good to waste on rubbish.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—B.1685 (3s.), B.1686 (3s.).—Peter Dawson: *Indian Love Lyrics* (Woodford Finden): *The Temple Bells*; *Less than the Dust*; *Kashmiri Love Song*; *Till I wake*.

Perhaps Mr. Peter Dawson is as tired of these songs as we are. He sings them with a business-like air strangely out of keeping with the pseudo-oriental atmosphere that pervades these Love Lyrics.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—D.740 (6s. 6d.).—Harry Dearth: *The Rolling Stone, and It's a beautiful day*.

Mr. Harry Dearth has a very clear diction and every word of these two ballads by B. Hamblen and T. C. Sterndale-Bennett can be heard.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—C.1119 (4s. 6d.).—The Band of the Coldstream Guards: *Mediterranean Life Suite*, by Battershill.

A delightful band record.

**PATHE.**—5767 (4s. 6d.).—Rosé String Quartet: *Op. 18, No. 4, Allegro*; *Op. 18, No. 5, Minuetto* (Beethoven).

The lovely minuetto is specially worth hearing. This is the best record I have heard of the Rosé Quartet.

**PATHE.**—5769 (3s.).—Lenora Sparkes: *Romance, Act III, Tales of Hoffmann* (Offenbach); *Ave Maria* (Mascagni).

Lenora Sparkes' excellent voice is well suited to the Romance from Hoffmann, and she sings both songs beautifully.

**PATHE.**—5770 (4s. 6d.).—Pathé Military Band: *Grand March from Tannhauser* (Wagner); *Marche des Cortèges* (Gounod).

This is a splendid band record.

**PATHE.**—5766 (4s. 6d.).—Lamoureux Orchestra: *Alborada e Variazioni, Parts I and II* (Rimsky-Korsakov).

This most attractive music is very well played by the Lamoureux Orchestra, and the recording is specially good.

**PATHE.**—1702 (3s.).—Pathé Concert Orchestra: *Cockney Band; Invicta March*.

Two very jolly marches.

**PATHE.**—1703 (3s.).—Eleanor Ball: *Traumerei* (Schumann). Imperial Instrumental Trio: *Fare Thee Well, Love (Keith)*.

I suspect Miss Ball is accompanied by the hand that plays in the trio. The touch is a little wooden, but this may be the piano's fault. Traumerei is a good medium for a very fine violin tone.

**PATHE.**—1707 (3s.).—Scott Blakely: *I've loved her ever since she was a baby; Breakfast in bed on Sunday morning*.

Two humorous Scotch songs, wonderfully clearly sung.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—B.1684 (3s.).—De Groot and the Piccadilly Orchestra: *A Garden in Brittany; Destiny Waltz*.

This is a record up to the De Groot standard.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—B.1688 (3s.).—Norah Blaney and Gwen Farrar: *Percy's posh Plus Fours are priceless; Who tied the can to the old dog's tail?*

These two clever artists give a very good rendering of two of their popular numbers, though their words are not very clear.

**IMPERIAL.**—1167 (2s.).—Ferrara's *Hawaiian Serenaders*: *Annie Laurie; Old Black Joe*.

These serenaders give a very cheerful account of Annie Laurie, and in Old Black Joe, a concertina comes to their aid. There is altogether more "pep" than is usual in ukelele records.

**IMPERIAL.**—1174 (2s.).—Hugh Donovan: *River Shannon Moon. Frank Munn: Mother in Ireland*.

These are two dreadfully sentimental songs. Hugh Donovan has an excellent recording voice, and we hope to hear him in something better. Mr. Munn is not quite so successful.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—B.1689 (3s.).—Una Bourne: *Six Cuban Dances* (Cervantes).

These dances are beautifully played by Miss Bourne. A desirable record.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—C.1120 (4s. 6d.).—Mayfair Orchestra: *Three Dream Dances* (Coleridge Taylor).

Light music this, and charmingly played.

**HIS MASTER'S VOICE.**—C.1124 (4s. 6d.).—Mayfair Orchestra: *"Stop Flirting" Selection*. Conducted by G. W. Byng.

A clever selection on two sides, and well recorded.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial A.277 (4s.).—Browning Mummery and Richardson: *Lend me your aid; Be mine the delight* (Gounod).

Browning Mummery's voice records magnificently, not only because it is a good voice but because it is in the right place. Mr. Richardson supports him adequately in these two duets from Gounod's operas.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial A.276 (4s.).—Black Diamonds Band: *The Captive Slave* (Varney); *In a Monastery Garden* (Ketelby).

Two good band records. In a Monastery Garden is a descriptive composition, and birds, bells, and a choir with tenor chorister (none other than Mr. Browning Mummery) enrich it with realistic detail.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial 2360 (2s. 6d.).—Browning Mummery: *Thanks be to God* (Dickson); *The Lord is my Light* (Alletsen).

This record gave a great deal of trouble. At first it seemed that nothing could make it tolerable, so loud the rattle and wobbley the voice. However, it seemed worth while to persevere with it, and it finally found itself on the Vocalion with a medium H.M.V. needle, when both sides proved to be admirable as far as the voice is concerned. As to the qualities of the sacred songs, that is a matter of opinion. Both sides should be played through with a fibre needle to clean them at least three times before being seriously listened to.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial 2358 (2s. 6d.).—Joe Brookes (Cornet) and Horwich R.M.I. Band: *Perfection Polka; Three Blind Mice*.

A good cornet solo for those who like cornet solos, and an amusing arrangement of Three Blind Mice.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial 2367 (2s. 6d.).—Melville Gideon: *Secrets; I ain't goin' no more a' rovin'*.

Sung, played, and composed by Melville Gideon.

**ZONOPHONE.**—Serial 2368 (2s. 6d.).—George Formby: *We're all old pals together; I'm daft*.

For those who have seen George Formby (and who has not?) and can picture his forlorn dilapidation this record is almost as good as the real thing.

**ACTUELLE.**—10509 (5s.).—Yvonne Gall: *At Dawning* (Cadman); *Annie Laurie*.

Miss Gall sings a song of which the chief refrain is "I love yew" instead of At Dawning, which is disappointing as it would have been interesting to hear her sing that charming song. She compensates for this on the other side with a very sweet rendering of Annie Laurie.

**ACTUELLE.**—15146 (4s. 6d.).—Elvino Ventura: *O Sole Mio* (Di Capua); *Lolita* (Spanish Serenade) (Buzzi-Piccia).

On a Vocalion with a soft-toned needle these two songs are very good. With a loud needle they are dreadful.

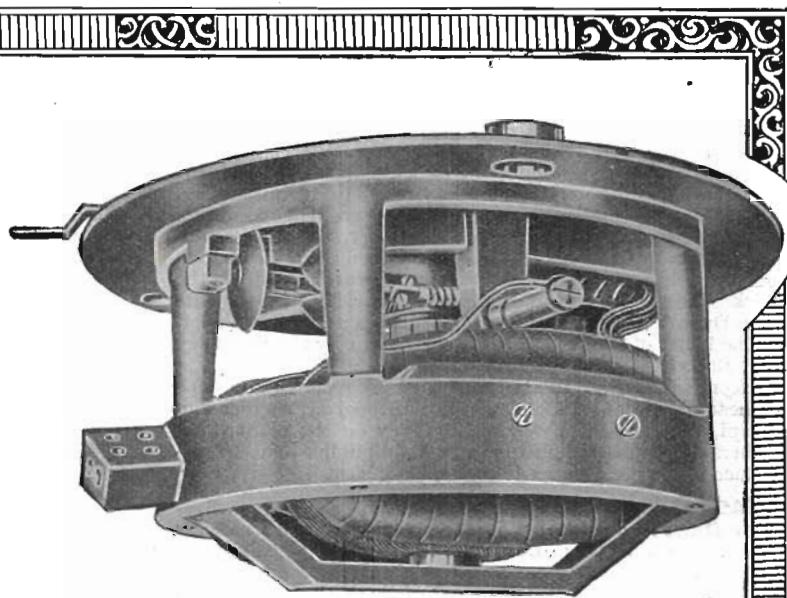
**ACTUELLE.**—10510 (3s.).—Hudson Male Quartette: *The Owl and the Pussy cat; Honey, I wants yer now*.

Very clearly sung and well recorded.

(An article on Dance Music held over till next month.)

F. SHARP.

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## *De Gustibus Non Est Disputandum*

[The Editor wishes to emphasise the obvious fact that the publication of letters does not imply his agreement with the views expressed by correspondents.]

### MADAME FRANCES ALDA.

I have procured from America the following Alda records: (1) Victor No. 89129, Gounod's *Ave Maria*, obbligato by Elman. This is much better than any record of this available in this country, in fact a particularly good one and well nigh perfect. (2) Victor No. 74399, *Panis Anglicus* (Franck) with 'cello obbligato by Giulia Casini. *This is the most perfect soprano record I know*, and I have over 600 records, chiefly H.M.V. Celebrity chosen from trial of thousands in the past three years. The music is most beautiful and her voice—well, it should be heard! (3) Victor No. 64687, *Deep River*, with male quartet. A very beautiful and almost perfect record—far better than the recent H.M.V. record of this and than Roland Hayes' record. (4) Victor No. 64908, *By the Waters of Minnetonka*, also a beautiful recording with orchestral accompaniment. (5) Victor No. 64981, *Ebben? andrò! andrò!* (La Wally), a most beautiful record. . . . These records as a lot are the finest soprano records I know, and I think I may claim some gramophone experience. Alma Gluck's and Zimbalist's *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt* (No. 87518) I also got, and this too is a very fine record of a beautiful rendering.—G. O. TURNBULL (Lieut.-Col.).

### EVAN WILLIAMS

I am an enthusiastic subscriber to your periodical, and should like to congratulate you most heartily on it. I am the type of piano-player (by no means a "pianist") who aesthetically can be "taught nothing" by my various masters (or so they've told me!) but who will never do any good on account of an appallingly defective technique! The gramophone helps me out considerably, and I am a keen collector of records—most of them "good"—of which I have about 400.

The pains you are taking to find the best method of getting the best possible reproduction, etc., is most interesting, and I have been surprised at one omission—that of the "Clifophone" Arrow Needle. I now use this needle to the exclusion of all others, as I find it minimises surface-noise, is as loud as the ordinary H.M.V. "loud tone" needle, and seems to throw the voice further forward and into the room. It is even more markedly superior with orchestral records, and I commend it to your notice.

One is tired of reading in the recording companies' leaflets the glowing eulogies of stars like Galli-Curci, Caruso and Chaliapin; could you not advance the claims of such singers as (for example) Clarence Whitehill and the late Evan Williams? There are to-day no singers more artistic or sympathetic than these, and their voices will bear comparison with the greatest—furthermore, they record well (in Whitehill's case, magnificently). The latter's record of *The Two Grenadiers* is a far superior rendering to Chaliapin's, which strikes me as being needlessly dramatic. Whitehill's enunciation, too, is splendid, and every word of this fine song can be clearly distinguished.

For those who wish to compare Evan Williams with Caruso, there is a record by each of them of the *Ingemisco* from Verdi's *Requiem*, while those who feel like comparing him with John McCormack may do so by the record each has made of Schubert's *Serenade*.

In both cases I unhesitatingly choose Evan Williams's record, the sympathy of his voice is genuine, and most appealing—in Caruso's it is artificial and at times repellent, and in McCormack's it is conspicuous by its absence.—AIGUILLE (PETERBOROUGH).

### A DECCA ROMANCE

I read C. R. S.'s article on "A Decca Romance" in the August issue with great interest. He may be interested to know that there is another Decca with, as I think, as good a War record as his own.

My brother took a Decca out to France with him in November, 1915. I see in some of his books that he was in Bouzincourt in December of that year; so it is likely that, like the other Decca, his went straight out to that village. Strange to say, one of my brother's first records was *A Little Love, a Little Kiss*. His record

is, however, no longer, all of them having been destroyed at the Front. The Decca was sent back to this country, shortly before the end of the War, and has been in constant use for three-and-a-half years.—J. S. A. (EDINBURGH).

### THE BEST RECORDS

I wonder if any of your readers would care to put forward their choice of the twelve records that they prefer to all others. I find it is a very fascinating and difficult problem.

As a gramophone lover of over five years standing my choice has been made from a very large number of records nearly all H.M.V., but I must point out that I am no musician, merely a lover of good music. Here is my list: (1) *Una voce* from *Il Barbiere*, sung by Galli-Curci; (2) *The Flower Song* from *Carmen*, sung by Martinelli; (3) *Eri tu from Un ballo*, sung by Battistini; (4) *Elegie* by Massenet, sung by Caruso, violin accompaniment by Elman; (5) *The Flower Duet* from *Butterfly*, sung by Alda and Braslaw; (6) *O vecchio cor che batti* from *I due Foscari*, sung by Amato; (7) *Wotan Kisses Brünnhilde into a Deep Slumber*, from *Valleyrie*, sung by Clarence Whitehill; (8) *Brünnhilde Hails the Radiant Sun*, from *Siegfried*, sung by Florence Austral and Tudor Davies; (9) *Wotan's Farewell to Brünnhilde*, Coates conducting the Albert Hall Orchestra, vocalist Whitehill (*Valleyrie*); (10) *Siegfried's Funeral March*, from *Gotterdämmerung*, by the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra. I have no doubt of these ten but what to include or exclude when completing the list almost passes my comprehension. I think the final two must be (11) *Song of the Volga Boatmen*, sung by Chaliapin; and (12) the great quartet *Bella figlia*, from *Rigoletto*, sung by Caruso (and a super-Caruso on this record), Galli-Curci, Perini and De Luca. I have numbered the records merely for the purpose of clearness and not in any way to denote order of merit.

My favourite artists for all round excellence are the divine Galli-Curci, Alma Gluck, and Martinelli, loveliest of all tenors, save the rare incomparable Caruso of just a few records, where that mighty voice is restrained; Battistini, most perfect of singers; Amato, whose glorious baritone voice is heard, I think, almost to perfection on the gramophone; Chaliapin; and, for English songs, that beautiful tenor the late Gervase Elwes.—T.R.S.

### THAT BLIND ALLEY

A word in defence of those poor black sheep, "The Gramophonists of Blind Alley." Alas! I am one of them.

It is just because we love music so much that we try to reduce the imperfections of our "humble stepping-stone," by every means in our power. We believe the precious music is worth all the time and trouble we can give to render it at its best—and only at its best will the gramophone successfully carry "the message of Bach, Beethoven and Wagner."

Guilty of many sound-boxes, I confess my crime: naked and unashamed, I glory in my vice.

Neither my fellow culprits nor I myself spurn the glamour of the *Parsifal* records because they happen to be shorn lambs! We think half a loaf better than no bread. We do not purge them from our libraries (*pace* C. S. R.), but we have searched and more or less succeeded in compelling them to give out their best, and in mitigating their worst. Contrary to C. S. R.'s experience, I have found that the finer the musical temperament the greater its sensibility and irritation to extraneous noise. I claim that we, who smooth our lady's path, are the true music worshippers. Could C. S. R. be fully receptive to, say, the *Eroica* slow movement were he being tormented by mosquitoes? Could he get into touch with the infinite under such conditions?

Well, blasts and scrapes are our mosquitoes.—SUSSEX.

### A BINDING SUGGESTION

As I am quite sure that many of your readers will be anxious to retain in permanent form their copies (or large parts of them) of your excellent periodical, I venture to send particulars of a

binding scheme I have adopted to preserve my own copies clean and flat, and which will not affect in any way any future binding scheme which the publishers may contemplate.

From Messrs. Jackson Bros., Ltd., Armley, Leeds, I purchased a *Titan* Looseleaf Folio, No. 937, size 10in. by 8in., at a cost of about 3/6, including postage. I then remove such extraneous matter as the cover of *THE GRAMOPHONE* (which, in passing, I may say is a credit to its designer, being neat and "good" in appearance, and adds an excellent effect to the paper); also, advertisements (and, in my own case, the Society Reports, which leave me quite unmoved). Next, I trim the edges of the paper neatly with a sharp penknife, taking off  $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from top, bottom and one side, thus making the paper fit into the binding case, aforementioned. I then put the copies into the case, an operation which takes one minute, there being no clips, holes to be punched or other arduous performances connected with *Titans*. I am immediately possessed of an excellent volume, all the pages of which are held tightly together, and I can readily turn to any of the excellent articles of interest or information without hunting all over the house for the part I want, thus seriously disturbing that quietness of mind so essential to the proper digestion of the contents of your splendid paper. I may say in conclusion that I am not connected with the firm mentioned in any way, and have no other motive in my suggestion than to pass on a good thing.—*J. R. (St. HELENS).*

#### MICA DIAPHRAGMS

In your September number I see that E. S. G. is advocating the abolition of the mica diaphragm. If I may be allowed to say it, he is not the only one who is tired of the whine and hiss of the mica, as my own experience is that for a full mellow tone celluloid requires some beating. Have you ever heard the "Cronacustic" sound-box which is made in Germany? This has a deep and rich tone, and yet is quite clear with such things as flutes, cornets, etc., while for a symphony orchestra I have yet to hear one to beat it. The stylus bar of this sound-box is unlike anything I have yet seen, being padded with rubber at the bottom to prevent jarring. The price of this sound-box is only 5/-, yet I have heard others at 30/- and 40/- which do not come near it for tone and fullness. Surface noise is practically negligible on a new record, and even on an old record does not get on one's nerves when this sound-box is used. The diaphragm is not mica, so perhaps this is partly the reason for little surface noise. In regard to records of the pianoforte, I have not heard anything yet to touch this sound-box when used with a Sympathetic Chromic needle.—*A. H. M. (HUDDERSFIELD).*

#### THE DUOPHONE

I think that you are to be greatly congratulated on the tests of machines and sound-boxes which you recently conducted. It is next to impossible to judge fairly between machines heard at different times in different rooms, and it is scarcely possible for a private individual to make the sort of tests that alone can stand as a guide for the careful buyer.

I wish that it had been possible to include a Duophone in these tests, as I think that this machine is the best of all—and I have heard most of those mentioned in your list. In the form in which it is sold, the sound-box seems to me to excel any other, *even in the type of reproduction best suited to each of these others*. I have however, effected what I think to be a further improvement by substituting an "Astra" diaphragm for the thicker of the two mica diaphragms fitted to the Duophone sound-box, and I am hoping to find something for the other diaphragm that will obviate the variations due to temperature that are always associated with mica. Owing to the excellent idea underlying the construction of this sound-box, it is only necessary to consider the higher tones in this case, since the lower tones are perfectly handled by the other diaphragm.

I have no sort of connection with any commercial gramophone concern whatever, but I recommend everyone to hear the "Duophone" before deciding in favour of any of the machines mentioned in your tests. Apart from this machine, however, I am in complete agreement with the results you record.—"NEARLY SATISFIED" (S.W. 10).

I have read with much interest the letter from "Sussex" in the August issue. With reference to steel needles being over loud for a small room, may I recommend him to try a Warrener mute with a steel needle (loud), and to have the needle projecting  $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Fibre needles are very nice with certain sound-boxes and certain records, but when used with unsuitable sound-boxes frequently tend to blur the detail, and in some cases give a distinctly "woolly" tone.

I am now using a Duophone sound-box and tone-arm fitted to a Fulltone cabinet machine, which I find such a vast improvement on the usual single sound-box that I am surprised no mention has been made of it (that I have seen) in *THE GRAMOPHONE*. This particular box is fitted for fibre needles, but is far better with steel, whereas the Fulltone box (aluminium shell) gives a much superior result with fibre. There is also no doubt that, generally speaking, the newer sound-boxes, evolved by modern research, give the best results with the particular make of machine for which they were designed. I find my Duophone gives a greatly improved result with my machine, but does not come anywhere near the result obtained on the Duophone machine, and the same applies to the Lenthall.

Concerning records, I should like to mention the new Zonophone 2344, Rachmaninoff *Prelude* and Liszt *Rhapsody No. 2*, by Harwich R.M.I. Band. Being 10in., the reverse is of course badly cut; but how refreshing to be able to get music of this class by a brass band as opposed to a military! Also, what an artistic performance and how beautifully recorded!

With original works by Cyril Jenkins and Hubert Bath, as well as the previous arrangements of standard works, there are now a number of very excellent records to be had of St. Hilda Colliery, Wingate's, etc., in Zonophone, Columbia, Winner, H.M.V., and Meloto, and the even timbre and quality of tone of a brass band lends itself well to reproduction.—*H. GORDON TIDEY.*

#### A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

*To the Soi-disant Judges (?) of the Portables.*—One and all, we are more than surprised at your most extraordinary verdict—not judging—of the portable type of gramophone entrusted to your care, as to their respective merits, tone colour, volume, etc. Considering the fact that *all* portables, excepting the Decca and Waveola, are of a type the fact of placing *one* above the *other* in merit shows incompetence outright. We refer to the placing of the Handephone as the *best* portable. Are you all serious? or making a joke? If the latter it is a poor one indeed. As to the Waveola being placed third a few *facts* might be useful to you all, viz. Mr. H— of the — admitted our Waveola was infinitely better. Mr. B— M—, a singer of repute, and a judge of tone, said, our portable is the *only* one with *lifelike colour* on all kinds of records, and Major E— of the W— Co. discarded an H.M.V. portable in favour of ours and had a large cabinet Vocalion converted with our Pat sound chamber. We are *quite sure* your judgment is worthless and inaccurate, and we are ready to challenge *all* or *any* of the portables judged by you to a *public* contest at any time and *prove* ours is the best on the market. We thank you for your attempt—a poor one—at finding the best portable and consider we have been defrauded of the merit we are entitled to.—*GRAMO DEPOT.*

I wish you to cancel my order for one quarter page of the November issue of your paper. Don't think this is because of your judge's verdict of the Waveola. I should not have taken any notice of the H.M.V. or Decca being placed above ours, but the Handephone, which is the same as a dozen or more English Portables not to say dozen of German ones. It would seem a waste of money to advertise on my part.—*L. DAVIDSON (Propr.).*

[We would ask any of our readers who think that the above letters are justified to refer to the report on the tests of portables in our last issue. We have printed them as accurately as possible, but omitted irrelevant names.—*ED.*]

#### WHY NOT?

May I solicit your powerful support in approaching the big recording firms—H.M.V., Columbia, and Vocalion—with a suggestion?

One great obstacle in the way of the humble gramophone enthusiast is the difficulty of becoming acquainted with a record before purchasing. You, sir, I take it, receive all the new records *gratis* as they are issued, together with the benediction of their makers. But your correspondents are not so favourably circumstanced, and have to purchase more or less in the dark.

We cannot altogether trust the glowing descriptions of the makers! Naturally they make the best of their own productions, and in many cases no doubt their superlatives are fully justified. Nor can we wholly follow the excellent reviews of records which

appear in your own and other columns, if only for the very good reason that tastes differ, and that a record which pleases one good judge may be banned as worthless by another, or may altogether escape his notice. Last month again, a revered authority (not writing in "THE GRAMOPHONE") dismissed the new Columbia records of the Seventh Symphony with the remark that this particular symphony left him cold—interesting perhaps, but not what most of us want to know!

The records must be *heard*. You will remind me that the retail agents are usually willing to try over records before purchase. That is true, but one cannot tax their courtesy too far. Why should not the great recording firms give public auditions (horrible word!) of all their new records at the beginning of each month? Let them charge (if they like) for admission. I would "bet my bottom dollar" that such auditions would be largely attended, and would result in a largely increased sale of records. I will only add (as a grain of experience is worth an ounce of theory) that my own conversion to the gramophone was entirely due to a chance attendance at one such recital at—well, no matter where. Let the big companies adopt this plan, and give monthly auditions (or should the word be *renditions*?) of their productions.—H. H. ENSOR.

## QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

T. D. A. (Skewen, Glam.)—"I should like to know if there is any recording of the song *I did not know* (by Trotère, I believe)." [We don't know either. Can any correspondent oblige with the information?—ED.]

M. E. H.—" (1) Could you state the best vocal records which are sung in clear and good French; make and singer are immaterial as long as they are obtainable in England? (2) Which in your opinion is Cortot's finest record from the recording point of view, regardless of the composer or the interpretation? Also which do you consider is the best record of pianoforte reproduction, any make (English) or player? I have Schumann's *Traumseirenen* (H.M.V. E. 265) played by Moisévitch which comes nearer true pianoforte tone than any record I have heard, but even here there is a tendency for several notes to be distorted. . . . I am sorry you did not try the Recordia Diaphragm which I have found the finest medium for reproducing pianoforte records."

[I am so much prejudiced against French singers and French songs that I do not feel qualified to commit myself to an opinion; but I have a sneaking fondness for Plançon. Will someone less prejudiced than myself come to the rescue of M. E. H.?—ED.]

J. D. (Banbury).—"I welcome especially the series of 'Gramophone Celebrities' which tells one exactly what one wants to know about celebrity records. I hope that your definition of a celebrity is wide enough to include the many excellent singers who do not reach the height of a single-sided record! I have one suggestion to offer: that in reviewing records you should state definitely when you consider the record to be the best one of the song or whatever it is. What we want is comparisons which will bring out the best records. . . . Another point which troubles me is that I have no means of finding out when any particular record was made. Very few records, excepting perhaps Patti's, are dated."

[Within obvious limits we hope to follow these suggestions. With regard to the age of records, the number stamped on the record itself is the only guide at present.—ED.]

A. C. R. (Walmley).—" . . . There are practically no records of Berlioz, Brahms and others, and not much Bach . . . Surely Elgar isn't so very well represented after all? The Vocalion records of his Quartet are appallingly bad, and the two Concertos and Violin Sonata only passable and much cut. I am not an Elgar enthusiast, but want justice done to all the great composers, particularly those whose works get few concert performances, and consequently miss the popularity which is their due. . . . There is only one decent Sibelius record (*Festivo*) and nothing at all of Delius. We wish you could get the recording companies to bring out a series of double-sided records of classical and modern *Lieder* by one or two good *Lieder*-singers—such as Astra Desmond. At present we have only Gerhardt, and it will be a long time before she has done anything like an adequate library. . . . Have you noticed how much more quickly records wear out than they

did a year or two ago? We have experimented a good deal, and quite proved this. We have old orchestral records that have been used upwards of sixty times and still show no signs of wear, whereas now they generally begin to show signs of it after being played half a dozen times, even when one gets them direct from London. . . ."

[I wish we could get more *Lieder*, but as long as our betters are taking off their hats to France, the recording companies will probably be afraid of German songs. Bravo the Vocalion for giving us Gerhardt.—ED.]

E. W. V. S. (Brighton).—"I am particularly curious as to the Collier with external vulcanite horn. I have an old large wooden horn (Murdoch Tournaphone) and a Columbia table model, with Lenthall tone-arm and sound-box; and in some respects the horn model beats the other, more especially with some of Caruso's records. *Mia Picciarella* on the Lenthall is distressingly shrill, whereas the horn model mellows and takes the piercing ring out of the high notes. But the scratch is a drawback, which I fancy the Collier with its closing lid may considerably reduce."

A. C. G. (London, S.E.).—"I am severely criticised for my taste in records and am told that they are puzzling, dreamy excerpts from some dusty raftered cobwebbed hall. Now, for my friends at Christmas, I would like for my 'new poor' apartment examples of 'Baronial Hall' mirth: so will you kindly name twelve records giving rollicking songs with hearty swinging chorus, and also suggestions which will enable my gramophone to create a real atmosphere of merriment? In short, a double programme of clean fun!"

[Will readers please oblige in time for our December number?—ED.]

J. E. V. (Letchworth).—"Is it quite impossible for us to have two or three new recordings by Mme. Galli-Curci before Christmas? Perhaps she would give us *Bel raggio lusingher* from Rossini's *Semiramide* and *Caro Nome* from *Rigoletto*. It would be a great pleasure to see Mme. Edvina's name appear more frequently in the H.M.V. monthly catalogue. She has a beautifully sweet and expressive voice."

[*Caro nome* has been recorded by Mme. Galli-Curci and is in the Victor catalogue, 12in., 74499. It was in the 1922 English H.M.V. catalogue, but I can't get it. There is some mystery here. Yes, I agree about Madame Edvina.—ED.]

S. D. ISAACS.—"I should be much obliged if you would inform me whether the following pieces have been subjected to 'cuts' in record making as it is difficult to procure scores of the music of them: (i) Columbia L.1362-64. Mozart Quintet in G minor. (ii.) Columbia L. 1459 Movement from Holst's *Planets*. (iii.) Columbia 908 and 914, London Symphony Orchestra records of the *Jewels of the Madonna*, *Susanna's Secret*, and Sibelius's *Festivo*. (iv.) Columbia L. 1460 Lener Quartet records of movements from quartets by Schubert and Mozart. (v.) Columbia 937 and 938. English String Quartet records of Haydn's Quartet in E flat. (vi.) H.M.V. D 690. Beethoven's *Coriolan* Overture. (vii.) H.M.V. D 592. Prelude to *Tristan*. (viii.) H.M.V. D 503 *Entry of the Gods into Valhalla*."

[I believe that most of the Columbia records are cut in places. No. vi. is complete, No. vii. has a cut and an unnecessary repeat, which is a pity, and No. viii. has a rearrangement of the score, but no actual omissions. As I have said elsewhere cuts are not necessarily an evil. The question is whether they are well chosen or whether they damage the structure of a composition wantonly.—ED.]

J. H. (Worcester).—"On page 80 of THE GRAMOPHONE you refer to Toscanini's Milan Orchestra. Are the records obtainable in England, and if so, where?"

[At present the only address that I know of for the Toscanini records is The Gramophone Exchange, 29, New Oxford Street, London, W.C.2.—ED.]

L. D. H. (London, N.W.).—"Would you tell me in THE GRAMOPHONE why, if Mme. Galli-Curci is the best soprano of the day—I am led to believe this from THE GRAMOPHONE—why does she only have a red label in duets with De Luca, while he has a buff label with Mlle. Bori and other inferior people?"

[The records having been made in America, the colour of labels originates with the Victor Company. I suppose that old contracts have something to do with the matter.—ED.]

## CONCERTS.

Messrs. William Murdoch, Albert Sammons and Cedric Sharp are favourites in the gramophone world, and the pity is that they do not record for the same company nowadays. Listening to their trio Concerts at the Wigmore Hall made one wish that the whole of each programme could be heard on the gramophone, not merely one or two Sonatas like the Schubert Trio in B. flat (Voc. D-02050 and D-02060.) There are very few movements in the whole series—Beethoven Trio in B flat, Op. 97, Brahms in B major, Op. 8 and in C minor, Op. 101, Mozart in G major, Dvorak in F minor—which could not be done on one side of a record, and all would go on two sides with a break. Considering how exquisite the few trios recorded have proved to be, and how comparatively cheaply they could be recorded, it is high time that steps were taken to increase our meagre collection. Music-lovers within reach of the Wigmore Hall should remember that Mr. William Murdoch and Mr. Albert Sammons are giving three Sonata Recitals on November 10th and 24th, and December 8th at 3 p.m.

*Lener Quartet, October 15th, Wigmore Hall.*

The first quartet on the programme given by this famous quartet should be recorded in its entirety. It is Mendelssohn's Op. 44 No. 2 in E minor, which is the kind of music so simple and exquisite in its appeal that it would convert the most confirmed *tosh-lover* to better things. It is important that simple, understandable and tuneful chamber music should be recorded, so that those who have not known the pleasures of it may be gently led over the threshold to the great things beyond.

*Cramer Concert. October 11th. Aeolian Hall.*

A full programme of the better class of British ballads, sung by a miscellaneous collection of British voices, was varied by The Kendall String Quartet's performance of *The Biscay* by McEwen Le Phare and by the first performance of Adolph Mann's *Marionettes*—a light-hearted trio of characteristic music, all of which would probably be effective on the gramophone. Martin Shaw's songs also are worthy to be recorded—for instance Mr. John Buckley's singing of *Full Fathoms Five*, and Mr. John Adams' of *The Merry Wanderer*, both delightful.

*Emanuel Feuermann. October 17th and 25th. Aeolian Hall.*

These Cello recitals bring an extremely brilliant young artist before a limited public—though indeed the Aeolian Hall was crowded. But the far wider public of the gramophone world would equally enjoy the sensitive renderings of such things, as the Bach Suite in C major (though the Bourrée has been done often enough by others). In the shorter pieces, well suited for recording, Feuermann had full scope for his technique and emotions.

*Leo Sirota, at Aeolian Hall, October 19th.*

Sirota devoted himself to Chopin, and played all the Etudes in the course of the afternoon—with the B Minor Sonata Op. 58 in the middle of them. He interprets Chopin unsentimentally, but with exquisite feeling. As for his technique—we shall be able to appreciate it shortly on the gramophone, we believe. He has a quite remarkable left hand.

*Pouishnoff. Wigmore Hall, October 19th.*

The plum of the evening was W. F. Bach's organ Concerto, a rare and glorious thing, which should certainly be recorded, especially the first two movements and the last two.



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